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ABSTRACT

This document discusses the unique features and philosophy of the community college, and ways of maximizing community and college interpenetration. The central section of the report deals with the role of needs assessment in community education. The concept of needs assessment espoused herein stresses continuation and community participation as the basic organizing principles of needs assessment. Active involvement of college personnel and community residents in the design, conduct, and decision-making stages of the assessment is explained as being essential to the assessment process. An eclectic approach to techniques for assessing needs is urged. Among the data that should be obtained from an assessment should be: population demographics, educational achievements and needs inventory, a picture of institutions and groups with power to affect the quantity and quality of the interaction between the college and the community, and strategies for incorporating the above into an on-going process of interaction. Specific techniques in addition to survey research are listed for consideration in the performance of a needs assessment. Common pitfalls associated with needs assessments are presented as is a discussion of ways of avoiding such pitfalls. (Author/JDS)

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NEEDS ASSESSMENT FOR COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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Summary

The authors first present some statements about the philosophy of the community college, highlighting its unique curriculum, target population, and organization. Ways of maximizing community and college interpenetration are discussed. A Discussion/Planning Grid is introduced for use in focusing thought and action along two axes of educational philosophy and delivery. Various alterations of the grid and uses for it are suggested.

The central section of the report deals with the role of needs assessment. After a brief introduction to the variety of different types of needs assessment, the authors set forth their proposed Concept of Needs Assessment for Community Education. The Concept stresses continuation and community participation as the basic organizing principles of the needs assessment. The active involvement of college personnel and community residents in the design, conduct, and decision making stages of the assessment is explained. An eclectic attitude towards the many possible techniques is urged and a listing of particular data to be generated by the needs assessment is given.

A caveat about some of the pitfalls of the whole needs assessment process is given and examples are cited of some of the common misinterpretations that have been made of needs assessments in the past.

The final section lists specific techniques, in addition to survey research, which the authors feel should be considered for use in a needs assessment. A brief sketch of each technique is given and "brand names" of each type of technique are indicated so the reader may further research those that are of interest.

The concluding recommendation echoes the opening statement of philosophy: the needs assessment should be exploratory and should involve the community actively.

PHILOSOPHICAL FRAGMENTS

The community college is usually conceived of as being an institution built around several unique principles and procedures. The community college is usually broadly comprehensive in subject matter and disciplines embraced.

At the Community College the narrow focus of the typical four year institution is replaced by an approach to curriculum that is not only broader, but, more importantly, is less jealously guarded. New subjects can find an opening in the bastion of higher education more easily in the comparatively porous academic walls of the community college than in the denser membrane that separates the four year campus from its community.

Another important flexibility of the community college is in the area of the formats used for delivering education. Short courses, non-credit, evening classes, weekend workshops, open-ended enrollment and other breaks from the lock-step of semesters, 3 unit courses and elaborate registration and accrediting procedures are all familiar hallmarks of the community college.

In its accessibility to the people of the community surrounding it, the community college has in the past adopted a similarly porous, non-judgmental approach. Basically, anyone who has: reached the age of 18, can communicate in the language of the faculty and administration, has transportation, and can spare the time, is welcome at the community college. As minimal as these [illegible]ications may seem when compared to the elaborate selection devices and [illegible]tigious four year institutions, each of them should be examined [illegible]s to its functional effect. Part of the task of a needs assessment should be to measure or estimate the effect of each of these barriers (and the combination of all of them) on retarding the flow of potential customers to the community college. Additionally, much recent work has documented the hidden,

and for the most part unintended, barriers that have grown up to separate most of the population from most of the colleges. These subtle barriers of early expectations, culture-specific habits and procedures, and the hundreds of subtle reinforcements included in the way our community colleges have allowed themselves to be presented to the public should also be examined. As most of them were never consciously intended to have been set in place, no one should be able to justify not removing them.

Ideally, the membrane between college and community should be so porous and bias free as to be all but unnoticeable. Whatever it is that institutions of academic exclusiveness gain by making their separation from the communities around them obvious, it is in just the opposite direction that the benefits lie for the community college. The perfect symbiosis of college and community will exist when each is in part a resource for the other and in part is nurtured by the other. Although a perfect stable state of such a relationship will never be reached, in the effort to reach it both college and community can prosper.

There are many things that the college has been and can be to the community. It can serve as a validator or accreditor of previous learning experiences or currently on-going learning that is outside the administrative control of the college. The recent boom in such life experience accreditation, and its overwhelming acceptance as legitimate, transferable and degree earning credit by a growing number of institutions is evidence that this idea has finally come to its time. The college can serve as the community member's partner in designing, as well as accrediting, a variety of practicum or internship experiences. The most traditional way in which colleges have served as validators of learning from outside their walls has been in the area of accepting or rejecting transfer credit. A sample should be drawn to determine how much untransferable credit is lying wasted in the community simply because the

transcript is in a language other than English, or the school was destroyed in a war and only the students "unofficial" copy of the transcript is available.

The same assessment should be made for technical school credits. It should be determined not only how many units of such "untransferable" credit might be accepted, if unsupportable standards or procedures were changed, but how much the experience of having one's previous academic work rejected is itself a factor in students not coming into the system at all. In a society where paper licenses of all sorts are the sin qua non of economic survival and social acceptance, the practice of in effect stamping "invalid in this community" across the hard won certificates of many immigrants and trade school graduates is a social affront not to be taken lightly.

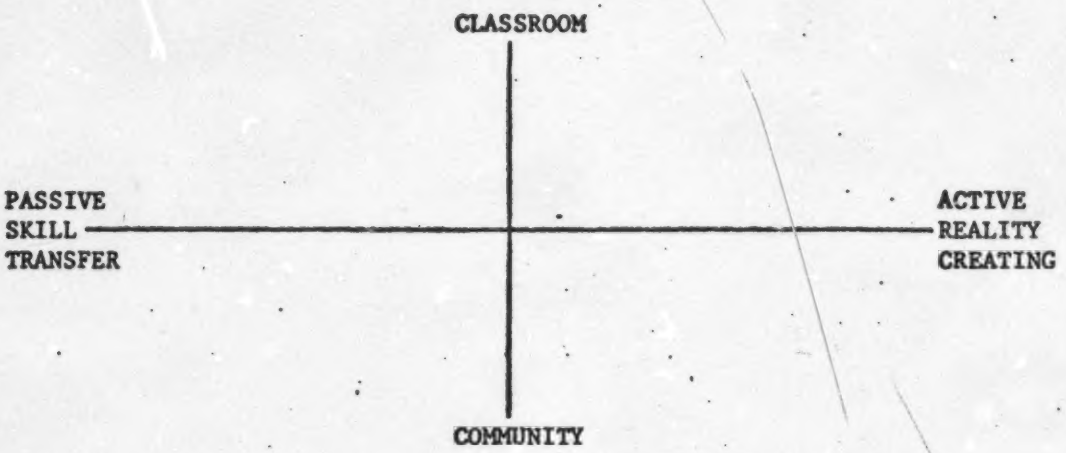
Another role that the college can serve for the community is that of a "tool chest" of techniques, expert consultation and information for solving community problems. This means more than simply providing a library full of data and "how to" books on citizen participation, although the expansion of a library into a community information center is a good companion project. What is involved in creating a consultant-to-the-community role for the college is, at the base, a reordering of perceptions of faculty roles: doing can become as rewarding as teaching. Many faculty, and quite fortunately many of those who have chosen to operate at the community college level, are in tune with this idea. They and their colleagues should be given the leadership and the support to organize the often sporadic efforts of separate faculty and/or specialized departments, into a comprehensive network. In full operation, such a system should appear to the community members as the first option to be turned to when faced with a problem. When a community association is unable to get a clear accounting from a developer, they should ideally turn to the community planner or law faculty at the college. When the businessmen's association needs more accurate forcasts of consumer demand, they should come

first to the college's economists and demographers. When a group of parents recognize that the delinquency of the children in their neighborhood is of a pattern and increasing, it should be to the child psychology and/or police science programs of the communtiy college that they first turn. This is not now the case. The community association may try frustratedly to qualify for a legal aid attorney. The businessmen may all chip in to hire an outside consultant. The parents will turn to the church and the police. This is o.k. These are the institutions who must be the ongoing strength of the community. But there is a role in here for the community college. As co-consultant, as the broker between agencies, as the expert back-up for the voluntary agencies, the community college can provide something that the other, single purpose, agencies cannot. The same comprehensiveness that is its strength in curricular areas can be made into its strength in community involvement.

What can the community offer the college. For one thing, expertise. No academic will maintain that he/she is the sole expert on their subject. The other experts are not only the other professors but those whose expertise comes from a non-academic involvement with the subject. As architecture professors work with indigenous builders, psychology professors with lay healers, urban planning instructors with developers, and accounting teachers with businessmen, this lesson comes home again and again. To recognize, organize and raise to the status now afforded colloquia of scholars this informal "collegium of experts" is a task that the community college is ideally suited for. Schools that have done this have found themselves on the leading edge of not just progress in community affairs, but of real subject area breakthroughs in the strictest academic sense.

An accurate needs assessment will develop a number of pictures, either as tables of figures or as spots on a map, of the various communities surrounding the college. Community can be defined as a matter of geography, economic and social status, ethnicity, age and family size, shared values, etc. These pictures of the community can be carefully lined up with similar demographic data on the population that currently attends the college. Where there are gaps or underrepresentation, further investigation should be done to determine how this came to be and what conscious or unconscious policy decisions it reflects. This data will be of great help in designing both the collegium of experts (as some kinds of expertise seem to group along demographic lines) and in creating the consultant-to-the-community capacity and organization.

A helpful adaption of Blake and Mouton's "Grid Training" scheme can be used as a tool for discussion and planning sessions. The basic grid is defined by two axes; one indicating a continuum of educational delivery systems: from the most traditional, labeled "classroom," to the most remote from the campus, labeled "community." Progress along this axis is congruent with moving physically out from a classroom deeper and deeper into the community and moving in time from traditional teaching hours of 8-4 into times closer and closer to night and dawn. The second axis usually is depicted as running from "passive skill transfer" to "active reality creating." In other words, at the far left end of the line is the relatively passive act of a student absorbing the principles of grammar and at the other extreme we can picture the student and faculty engaged as a team in constructing housing or running for office or opening a retail store.



Discussion/Planning Grid

Two responses are likely to take place with groups using the grid. Often everybody starts plotting points to indicate their perceptions of where the school as an institution, or themselves as a teacher, fall. Or, and this is an indicator of a more self-assured and diverse group, the players start a debate over the labels on the ends of the axes. Classicists tend to put down the notion that the learning of Greek syntax is either passive or opposite from the creating of a reality. Vocational education people point out that in the particular community they are in, the only facilities modern enough to teach their speciality are in the classroom. Someone always raises the question of where to place a class taught in the classroom, but at midnight during so-called "community time."

Either of these discussions can be useful to the planner/administrator. Further developments of the game include scatter plotting current courses, then laying over a transparent scatter plot of courses offered 5 years ago, then 10 and 25 years ago. Patterns that are revealed can be guessed about in terms of reactions to fads, economics, changes in the population, etc.

An attempt can be made to categorize all activities engaged in, by, or, at the college by quadrant: I (upper left) = Most traditional

II (upper right) = Less traditional subjects, but same old location.

III (lower right) = Least traditional subjects in the least traditional formats.

IV (Lower left) = Traditional subjects taught in unusual places.

Hopefully none of this is used as an x-ray would be used but rather as a way of generating thoughts, some anxiety and a host of new ideas.

There is something of a needs assessment involved in discussions like that suggested above. In a way, the degree of response to such an exercise assesses the spirit and readiness of the people at the institution to consider new ways of doing things. The more rigorous needs assessment that must be performed is described next. It is, however, only a tool for generating data. The spirit, compassion, wisdom and dedication of those who will receive the data will be the deciding factors. If they are both ready to defend quadrant I classes because of their broad appeal and proven effectiveness and ready to try out some quadrant III if it can be shown they are needed and doable, then the needs assessment data will be falling into willing hands.

THE ROLE OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

An astounding variety of different processes, techniques and philosophies all carry the over-used title "needs assessment." We have found documents described as "needs assessments" that are little more than one author's opinions as to what a particular program needs. We have found others that consist totally of survey research data, displayed in tabular form, and which are devoid of any discussion, conclusions or recommendations.

In terms of time, needs assessments can be anywhere from the common "one shot" survey, usually launched during the period during which a grant is being written up and concluded on the day the printer is ready to stick the tables of data into the appendix, while everybody prays that the data somehow support the conclusions, to the more recent and progressive examples of needs assessment which cast the process as essentially open ended and continuous. Whatever techniques are set up for generating data and making conclusions are run continuously. New data is allowed to form new conclusions which are used to reprogram on-going activities and launch new ones to meet newly discovered needs. Most planners agree that the "one-shot" type of needs assessment is suited only to the "one-shot" type of program.

Much of the differentiation found among items all referred to as needs assessments comes from the needs and the ways of thinking of those doing the assessment. For example, educators tend to see needs assessment as assessing their student population (already defined) to discover in what areas (from a prescribed list) they are deficient (as measured by a pre-set rubric of deficiency.) As the most common use of needs assessment data by educators is to establish baselines against which to measure pupil progress, a strong bias towards quantifiable data, maximally stratified by individual, grade

level, teaching technique, etc. becomes the most common form of educational needs assessment.

As another example, physical planners tend to cast everything in terms of spaces and their uses. Their needs assessments of communities often begin with the task of measuring: the measuring of space leads to the measuring of square feet of retail space, which leads to the measuring of the number of parking stalls, which leads to the measuring of the number of cars owned per family, etc. It is clear that to the educator or the social worker the kinds of needs assessment produced in the past by sticks and bricks physical planners is greatly lacking in human needs data. Another group engaged in needs assessment are community organizers. The organizers first task is to get into his/her head a picture of the community that will bear some close relationship to the reality of the community and which can be used as a model to predict the community's reaction to certain possible strategic moves under consideration by the change agent or group. To meet these demands the needs assessment tends to end up focussing on political issues of power, alliances, weaknesses and strengths of different groups, etc. The baseline that is being established is not for measuring progress, but for predicting reactions. The spaces being measured are not physical spaces but spheres of influence.

A final example of a needs assessment comes from the area of market research. A good pre-marketing survey is in fact a needs assessment: it is assessing the potential need of the community for the product (or, as your more psychological analysis would have it, their need to purchase the product.) These analyses will be focused on one very specialized behavior, the act of buying, and often employ an experimental approach of testing out different approaches on different sample populations and comparing the results.

We feel that the best needs assessments are those that are designed on-site to meet the specific objectives of a particular project. As such, they draw freely from the variety of different philosophies and practices suggested above. A needs assessment which operates solely within the perimeters of one discipline or tradition is going to have a proportionately lesser chance of accurately depicting the community being assessed, for it is a community of fantastic variety, and only a process of equivalent eclecticism and openness stands any chance of coming close to matching it.

THE PROPOSED CONCEPT OF NEEDS ASSESSMENT

For this project, we propose a needs assessment which embodies several tested concepts. The first, and perhaps most important, is that the needs assessment be a continual, not a one-shot, process. This concept of continuation should run through all policy and procedural decisions made in the designing and in the doing of the needs assessment. Thus, all input instruments that are developed: surveys, questionnaires, meetings, hot-lines, open house, etc. should be operated on a continual basis. Obviously for some, like formally designed surveys, continuation will be achieved by staggered repetition at regular intervals. For many input processes, however, true real-time continuation can be achieved. The most simple example of this is the 24 hour hot-line or the old suggestion box. If the proper program of stimulators is operated, these can be very exciting receivers of community responses. What is ideal about such seemingly "rustic" methods, in comparison to complex survey tools, is that they can be operated continuously for no more than their original start-up cost plus a minimal operating expense.

The needs assessment should provide for a continuing, i.e. permanent, structure through which the community and the college can interact. If committees of community and faculty concerned with a a common area of interest (small business, Ilocano, theater) are created, they should be created not just to generate enough data for this month's (or semester's or year's) needs analysis, but they should be structured as part of a continuing process, not just a single or multiple interventions for the purpose of obtaining data. There are several reasons for this. The most practical is that it is good politics. A recent attempt to survey residents of the Waianae coast on problems they

wanted to discuss floundered on the refusal of the target group to be surveyed any more. Worse, even, than getting no data at all is the increasingly frequent response that gives knowingly false data as a way of striking back at the surveyor institution. This then is the second argument for continuation of contact: you get better and better data the more you are perceived as permanent. Sophisticated tools such as Delphi (see page 21) can capitalize on this phenomenon of the data shaping up with repeated samples by altering the questions asked in each sample based on the shape of the responses from all previous samples. The final argument is the moral one. The community has, at least in the perception of many of its leaders, a right to a more meaningful role in the school's decision making process than the "participation" allowed by one-shot interventions, be they surveys or committee meetings or whatever.

The whole area of the relationships established between the school and the rest of the community as a by-product of the needs assessment is one of the best arguments for continuation. Why turn aside all the relationships that the process of doing a needs assessment can establish simply because the "needs analysis" phase is over, or the grant has been turned in? Cases are known where an institution spent several thousand person/days on a needs assessment, during which hundreds of new contacts with the community were established, and then undertook a number of years later a massive community relations campaign to get to know these same people. The logic of the principle of continuation in this area is, hopefully, clear to all.

A continual needs assessment is a generator of data and ideas for other types of planning efforts. Once the continual needs assessment is in place and operating, the opportunities are there for integrating into it other planning processes such as the setting of goals and the delineation of objectives. These in turn can, in tandem with the continual needs assessment, lead into

the creating of timeframes, the establishment of program or need satisfaction milestones and finally to the overall evaluation of the school's response to the community's needs. We will, for the moment, put these further processes on the shelf for discussion later. It should be remembered, however, that part of the judgment of a good needs assessment should be the ease with which it can be integrated into these other important planning processes. As planners, we must be constantly aware that what we do in one phase of the planning process is, either by intent or default, a decision about what we intend to do and will be able to do in future phases.

What type of information should be generated by the needs assessment? In part, that judgment rests with those calling for the assessment. There may be particular pet conclusions, some obvious and some hidden, that the assessment is supposed to support or destroy. There are also the data-targets established by whatever application has achieved the financial commitment for doing the project. In addition to these, we suggest that the assessment design consider generating data on the following:

1. Picture of the salient demographic data about the community in terms of education.

2. Inventory of the educational achievements of the population.

3. Inventory of the educational needs of the population:

   -in gross
   -by frequency
   -ranked by community's definitions of importance.
   -ranked by traditional definitions of importance.
   -ranked by how efficiently L.C.C. could currently meet them.

4. Picture of the institutions and groups with power to affect the quantity and quality of the interaction between the college and the community.

5. Suggested strategies for incorporating the above into an on-going process of interaction.

6. Examples of unique educational "institutions" and processes at work in the community and suggestions for incorporating them into an on-going collaboration with L.C.C.

7. Inventory of particular problems being experienced by the community which the college could conceivably have a salutory effect on.

8. Outline of long range plan for continuing collaboration between L.C.C. and the rest of the community.

9. Suggestions towards a permanent structure for continuing interaction.

10. Baseline data for evaluation.

IS THIS A POOH TRAP FOR HEFALUMPS, OR A HEFALUMP TRAP FOR POOHS?

Doing needs assessments, like any excercise in myth building, is fraught with pitfalls. There are traps of philosophy, of methodology, of sloppy implementation, and of too great a belief in the veracity of the results. Being aware of these is perhaps the single most powerful protective against them. For some particular ones, such as the traps within the technologies of survey research, hiring qualified and experienced consultants is perhaps the most efficient countermeasure.

There are two major types of potential problem, accuracy and target. The accuracy questions lend themselves to all sorts of sophisticated mathematical cross checks. The target problems are subtler, and often not detected until after the work is completed. These are the problems of bias, projection and assumption. No matter how much the language is checked and re-checked, do questions really mean the same thing to the same people? How about across language and culture and age and sex gaps? Many other needs, besides those of the community supposedly being assessed, are often what gets measured. The school's needs might end up getting measured. Or the faculty's. Or (and this has happened more often than we would like to think) the needs of those who would like to become the faculty, administrators, etc. of whatever the assessment ends up showing is a "needed" new program. The assessor's need to produce a product must be kept in check. Finally, it is only the reported need that the tool is assessing. This reported need may not be congruent with the perceived need. The perceived need may only be a reflection of things desired. How much this is to be taken as an indicator of things needed? What no needs assessment can ever escape, no matter how sophisticated its techniques, is the phenomenological question of what is the "real" need and how does it relate to the perceived and reported need.

Some of the pitfalls of needs assessment are avoidable. Relying on only a few different types of techniques should be eschewed in favor of using a variety of different tools: some survey, some research w/previous data, some participatory, some impressionalistic, some physical, etc. An equal variety of technologies for displaying the data to the decision makers should be employed. We are working with a terribly diverse community here, at best we can only make informed guesses about their preferred methods of "seeing" information. The chances are, however, that an over-reliance on verbal forms and on mathematical information will minimize the usefulness of the data to the community.

Once information has been amassed from a variety of techniques, problems are going to arise in the interpretation of that data. It is likely, that as you increase the number of different types of yardsticks with which you are measuring the field, the variation in the measures will increase. We would caution against jumping too quickly into the statistician's lap to answer this problem. While it seems tempting to take the mean measurement as the resolution, this is valid only if you assume your problem to be one of error. In using a variety of different assessment techniques, not just a variety of different tries with the same or similar techniques, one produces contradictions not of error, but of definition and perception. It is important to work these through as an analyst would work through the contradictions in a patient's behavior, not as an A.A.U. score judge would "resolve" the variety of scores given to a diver; throw out the high and the low and average the rest.

A currently popular example: Interviews, in prison and on the street with persons known to have participated in looting stores during a major urban uprising yielded the "conclusion" that they were totally alienated from the American system and lead an existence even farther removed from the assumed

norms of American life than had been previously postulated. However, careful analysis of the types of merchandise looted, of the brand names and models preferred and those left behind yielded the inescapable conclusion that the thiefs were more than typically current in their knowledge of the latest fashions and fads of the American middle class and its merchants and advertisers. Bringing these two findings together (one yielded by opinion/interview, the other by physical/survey) requires more than a statistical rule or process.

SOME SPECIFIC TECHNIQUES

There are hundreds of techniques, tools and methodologies for conducting needs assessments. To further the confusion, certain techniques have come to be associated with certain methodologies and philosophies and even ideologies. The listing given here quite unabashedly borrows from supposedly "opposing" philosophies and ideologies. For the sake of the development of the list, we have for the moment taken on the luxurious artificiality that technologies are neutral.

The techniques are grouped into two categories: Those that are most used for collecting or generating bits of information, and those that are most used to work with that data. This "working with" includes not only various forms of analysis, but many forums of community interaction. As with the Discussion/Planning Grid (pg. 8), the process of working with the data is of as much interest as the end product of any analysis. Both must be used to get a full picture.

Techniques for Collection or Generating Information

Using Already Available Data

There is usually a mass of already collected data stored away in various papers, grant proposals, census reports, master's theses, etc. It is almost invariably the experience of research groups that the questions that have already been asked and answered turn out to be more in quantity and utility than had been assumed. One is seldom working in a data vacuum.

Student and community researchers can compile this already collected information and transfer it to more usuable formats, cull it for the most significant or reliable version of repeated inquiries, and develop ways of displaying it so that it is of maximum accessability and use.

Survey Research

This will be the statistical heart of any needs assessment. In addition to designing and conducting a new survey, attention should be given to finding out what surveys are currently underway or being planned in the near future by others. Collaborative surveying, or the simple piggy-backing of questions, can save hundreds of hours of duplication of effort. How many times does one need to draw up a sample for a particular census tract? At the far extreme of this piggy-backing stands the service offered by one company who will, for $300 per question, add your question to their on-going computer dialed phone poll of 800 Oahu residences.

The other crucial issue in doing any kind of survey is that of the residual benefits that can be gleaned. It is increasingly popular to use the survey research consultant not just to do the survey and hand in the results, but to train the existing on-site staff in the theory and technique of survey research so that they are able to conduct their own follow-up surveys. This idea has recently been extended to include using members of the sample population to do the research, training them as they go along. For the type of community and college interaction envisioned in this entire project, the involvement of both community members and college staff as research trainees under the guidance of an expert consultant recommends itself highly. In addition to building a research competence into the college and the community this approach provides a natural and effective way of coping with the problem of language and culture gaps between the surveyors and the target population.

Delphi, and Other Exotica

In addition to traditional survey research conducted by non-traditional people some of the newer survey tools such as the Delphi technique, in

which each "wave" of survey responses is used to restructure both the sample and the questions for the next wave, should be looked at.

Physical Factor Surveys

Things other than peoples verbalizations can be surveyed. Some of the types of so-called windshield surveys conducted by planners can give clues to community needs that won't show up in people's answers to questions. For starters, a simple survey of such life-support items as housing stock, automobile distribution, transportation network and even current land use should be collected. Most of this is probably already extant, some of it car be mounted as a surveyor observed addition to the door-to-door phase of any opinion or other verbal survey.

Other physical factors to be inventoried might include public meeting spaces of different types (i.e., w/desks, w/blackboards, w/p.a. and/or a.v. capacity, etc.) and a "time inventory" could be set up to plot when these spaces were most available. This data should be fed back to people working with the C.I.P. budget for the region, as well as used in the colleges needs assessment.

Reported Event Polling

A relatively new technique, reported event polling is an attempt to cross check opinion polls by "polling" not what people say they do (or might do or will do) but what actually is reported in the news media as being done by people. The technology of event polling is relatively simple, although methodological debates over the drawing of the "sample" are currently in vogue. With the great variety of ethnic, religious, trade, etc. periodicals reporting on events in the region an event poll could be particularly rich in giving a picture of activities in the area.

Participant Observation

Similar to event polling, in that it concentrates on behavior rather than opinion, participant observation means that those who are normally the participants in a variety of community activities are solicited and trained to act as reporters (or in the anthropologist's jargon "informants") to those studying the activity. If carefully structured to eliminate bias and/or conscious manipulation, this technique can yield information about an entire group without having to survey the group.

Ways of Working With the Information

In addition to the usual charts, tables, equations, etc. that can be derived from the data collected, a variety of techniques can be employed to use the data as a base for discussion and decision making by the community and the planner/administrators of the system.

Brainstorming Groups

Using any format that is well suited to the group, both specific and mixed groups should be given the opportunity to work with the data. Specific groups are those whose members all meet a certain test: age, ethnicity, distance from campus, length of time since last enrolled in a school, place of employment etc. Mixed groups can be structured around likely nexuses of interaction; for example, a group made up of retail merchandising students, local businessmen, someone from the Small Business Administration office, a consumer group and faculty from the areas of business and comsumer education might form a working group.

Synectics Research, Impasse, Delphi, and Other Games Planners Play.

There are a number of well developed games that can be used by a group to understand bits of information, themselves, and the planning processes. Some, such as the Synectics Research, are structured as problems solving laboratories. Others, like Impasse, look at the decision making process. Delphi and some of the other techniques for collecting data include integral techniques for working with the information as it is collected.

Challenge and Response Activities

Ever since politicians first leaked the plans for a new airport or launched a "trial balloon" in the media the technique of challenge and response has been in use. Planners seeking community feedback can design a number of more or less "possible" plans and let them out into the community through a variety of channels. The success of this technique lies in the common human behavior of a person being unable to tell you what color he or she would prefer to have their house painted until you inform them that the city is going to paint it brown whether they like it or not. This technique can backfire if not handled professionally but it should be considered, if only because politically experienced people are going to be doing it anyway.

Creative Responders

Recent futures research has rediscovered the importance of the artist as a visionary of the community's future and as a symbolizer of its mood. The involvement of creative persons from the community and the college in the planning process is strongly recommended. Creative responders can be used to lead analysis teams in developing pictures of the community's needs and the college's possible future responses by employing any of a number of paradign/metaphors. With a literary metaphor, scenarios of

possible action can be created. Using a political metaphor, teams can plot out what is most likely to happen. Working under a science metaphor (e.g. assume that the data are "symptoms" and that the team's task is to recommend a regimen to restore the system to "health") the same data can suddenly take on new importances. The use of creative responders and the employment of techniques such as these can not only enliven the process, but contribute significant new understandings about the nature of the community and its needs.

Operations Research and Systems Analysis

Most survey generated data lends itself rather naturally to the quantitatively based techniques loosely known as operations research. From the simplest analogue models to the alphabet soup of PERT, PEP, CPM, PPBS and MBO there are a great number of techniques for using quantified data. These quantitative techniques are crucial to any accurate picture of the community. Without their careful use and full understanding, those charged with forming a picture of the community will lack any check against the subjectivity that is an important part of the more open-ended and non-quantified techniques.

The above lists of collection techniques and ways of working with the data collected are not exhaustive, merely suggestive. Careful choices must be made by the project's managers to make sure that the technologies employed in assessing the community needs are those which have the highest potential for accurately depicting the reality of the community and actively engaging the broadest possible spectrum of community and college in that process. The most expensive and least alterable segment of a community needs assessment is the designing and conducting of formal survey research. It is important that this segment

be carefully nested into the other tools and techniques. Fortunately, most survey research specialists are very familiar with the other techniques and can be called upon to recommend how to dovetail the survey with them.

CONCLUSION

We have tried to present the results of our one-week exploration constructed around the question: "What is the best way to assess the needs of the community relative to the college?" If there is any one strand running across the fabric of our philosophy, our suggestions of the role of the assessment, and even into the particular techniques suggested, it is that the highest payoff in terms of accurate, usable and energy-creating needs assessment will come with the deepest involvement of the community. We recommend that the style of the needs assessment be heuristic and democratic, and that the personnel and techniques employed reflect this.

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